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Margaret Schwartz. *Dead Matter: The Meaning of Iconic Corpses.* Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2015. Illustrations. 168 pp. $25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8166-9434-1; $87.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8166-9433-4.

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Margaret Schwartzâs father died at home, unexpectedly, when she was fifteen years old. The difference between the body she saw at home and the body she witnessed at the funeral home created a dissonance that reverberated throughout her adult life, and is the impetus for the writing of this book. Schwartz describes *Dead Matter* as a materialist media theory of dead bodies, as a way to improve the understanding of the corpse as a communicative object. Photography and embalming brought about an iconography of the flesh, making the corpse a representational object, and play an integral part in her theory. She introduces a new use of the word âcorpus,â to describe âthe assemblage of images, practices, processes, and texts surrounding the corpseâ (p. 24). The title of the book sums up her theory of the dichotomy of the noun and verb, in that the corpse is both the physical husk of the deceased (dead matter) and a representation of a human who was loved and cherished, that the dead matter.

Schwartz uses the introduction to explain her theory, the paradox of the corpse as an assemblage, figurative, literal, referential, and liminal. It is both a thing and a representation. The author details how she organized the book into three themes around iconic corpses: âThe Body of the Nation,â âMartyred Bodies,â and âTabloid Bodies.â How these iconic corpses were displayed and mourned is indicative of the modern mortuary rituals that have evolved, which are heavily influenced by the introduction of photography and embalming. These two technologies have allowed corpses to become communicative objects, producing an image, a representation and preservation of the dead. Embalming changed funerary practice, prolonging the time before decay sets in, allowing for transportation of the dead. The author explains that photography and embalming of corpses are the media that she bases her materialist analysis theory on.

Chapter 1, âThe Body of the Nation,â explores the corpses of Abraham Lincoln, Vladimir Lenin, and Eva Peron. These iconic figures became even more iconic in death, their corpses becoming the representation of the nation. Lincolnâs embalming allowed his corpse to be transported, viewed, and mourned by hundreds of thousands. Though his embalmed body was allowed to be displayed, his wife did not permit photographs of the corpse. The photograph would have been a permanent representation. The embalmed body was allowed to be buried, thus to pass on. However, with the bodies of both Lenin and Peron, the embalmed body was set for display, the body of the nation in flesh. The corpse of Lenin is indefinite, and thus profoundly indexical. Peronâs embalmed body became a relic for âPeronistâ supporters. While

initially displayed, it was secreted away for a time, and then finally buried. Only photographs remain of her embalmed corpse. Alleged damage done to her corpse by the military became the embodiment of mutilations against the Argentine people. Schwartz uses these three examples to demonstrate that the embalming of these corpses sustained the identities and legacies of the leaders of the nation.

Schwartz relates in chapter 2 how two young men became modern-day martyrs and the photographs of their bodies turned into relics. Emmett Tillâs and Hamza al-Khateebâs nature of death made them into public figures. The photographs and videos of their tortured and mutilated bodies forged solidarity in their respective communities. Till, a fourteen-year-old black boy, was beaten, lynched, and dumped in a river by two white men for allegedly disrespecting a white woman. The photographs of his corpseâs gruesome appearance at his open-casket funeral were published in major black publications. They became a relic of the civil rights movement, the representation of racial inequality, and the idea of community. Those photographs bear witness, refusing to be buried and forgotten like his corpse. Al-Khateeb was a thirteen-year-old Syrian boy who was tortured, beaten, shot, and castrated after being arrested during a nonviolent protest. A video was posted on YouTube that displayed his corpse, documenting the details of his ordeal. The pixelated video of al-Khateebâs corpse transformed him from the death of one into the plight of an entire nation. The images of both young men remain, long after their bodies have been buried. Though these boys were unknown in life, they became significant in their death; the images of their corpses transformed into relics.

Chapter 3 examines the iconic corpses of celebrities. The author chose Princess Diana of Wales and Michael Jackson as representatives. Both of these individuals were famous public figures during their lives. Their deaths, and subsequent funerals, were international phenomena. Schwartz explains that these âtabloid bodiesâ have elements of both the âbody of the nationâ and the âmartyred bodiesâ examined in the past two chapters. A celebrity captures the heart of a nation, and their untimely death awakens the distant suffering and brings it close. The funerals of these two iconic corpses were a media blitz, and televised. However, their corpses were conspicuously absent. Schwartz proposes that the absent corpse allows the continuation of their legacy, their fame, and their commodity. The eulogies focused on their life, not their death, crafting a new image and memory.

In the conclusion, Schwartz reveals the arc of the book, how the display of the dead has gone from a physical presence, to a photographic reference, then to an invisible corpse. The practice has become to banish the dead, and thus banish communication with them. Schwartz proposes that the current model of mourning is flawed. Perusing photographs, visiting cemeteries, and lighting candles are not acknowledging the death, but looking for a facsimile of life. It is no longer in custom to even be allowed to grieve. Schwartz ends the book with a plea to find a way to communicate with the dead, to have an exchange that is more than symbolic, that allows them to have a voice. Essentially, her charge is that the dead matter, and they have something to teach those who would listen.

Dead Matter takes on a topic that is familiar, yet distant. Death is anathema in Western culture, the dead relegated to funeral homes, mourning to be done in private, and grief to be accomplished as soon as possible. Schwartz explores this phenomenon, diving into examples of how different corpses are displayed, remembered, and monopolized. The book is well organized, with each chapter building on the last, bringing the thread of her theory through into the conclusion. The topic is well researched and supported by media studies theory. Schwartz supports her theory utilizing quotes, ideas, theories, and writings of media theorists, philosophers, and art historians. That strength is also the bookâs weakness, in that it is almost too entrenched in media studies. The book feels like it is written to an audience familiar with media studies. The author appears to expect the reader to already have knowledge of Friedrich Kittler, Andre Bazin, Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari. However, the book still offers a profound insight, reframing the idea of death and the dead, encouraging a broader aperture into the image of the corpse.

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